Garrison Office Accused of Prompting Witness

NY Times 4/25/67

NEW ORLEANS, April 24 (UPI)—The Saturday Evening Post said today that the office of District Attorney Jim Garrison had "prompted" a key witness, Perry R. Russo, under hypnosis and drugs to describe a meeting in 1963 at which the assassination of President Kennedy was allegedly plotted.

Mr. Garrison's office denied the statements.

In an article in its issue of May 6 the Post said Mr. Russo never mentioned the 1963 "plot" in his initial interrogation by investigators.

It was only after sessions of sodium pentothal and hypnosis, the article said, that Mr. Russo came up with the story of the meeting, at which he said Clay L. Shaw, a businessman, David W. Ferrie, a pilot and Lee Harvey Oswald plotted the President's death.

The article by James Phelan quoted a 3,500-word confidential memo to Mr. Garrison from Andrew J. Sciambra, an assistant district attorney, in which, The Post said, Mr. Sciambra said Mr. Russo at first had not mentioned the meeting in 1963 and had failed to link Mr. Shaw with Oswald.

Mr. Russo, a 25-year-old insurance salesman, later testified about the alleged plot during Mr. Shaw's preliminary hearing. A three-judge panel ordered Mr. Shaw held over for trial. He has been indicted on charges of conspiring to murder Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Sciambra said The Post was "telling a half-truth." He said that Mr. Phelan had been fully advised of the full Russo testimony before he left Louisiana.

"Mr. Phelan's inference that our office is guilty of post-hypnotic suggestions to Perry Russo in an effort to influence him to tell our story is ridiculous," Mr. Sciambra said.

The Sciambra memo made no reference to a party in 1963 at Mr. Ferrie's apartment at which Mr. Shaw, using the alias Clem Bertrand, allegedly discussed with Mr. Ferrie and Oswald the assassination, The Post said.

"There was no positive identification of Lee Harvey Oswald as 'Leon' Oswald," as Mr. Russo subsequently asserted, the article said.

"Most striking of all, when shown a picture of Clay Shaw, Russo had said nothing whatever, according to the memorandum, about having known him as 'Bertrand.'"

The Post article said Mr. Russo had recalled the party only after prompting by Mr. Scambria while under the drug, and recalled the plot when "further prodded" under hypnosis.

The article said the hypnotist, Dr. Esmond Fatter, had told Mr. Russo to picture a television screen in his mind and instructed him:

"Let your mind go completely blank, Perry—see that television screen again, it is very vivid—now notice the picture on the screen.

"There will be Bertrand, Ferrie and Oswald and they are going to discuss a very important matter and there is another man and girl there and they are talking about assassinating somebody."

Mr. Sciambra said:

"Long before Mr. Phelan left New Orleans, the point was made emphatically clear to him that Perry Russo told me during our first interview in Baton Rouge of the party and conspiracy plot involving Shaw, Ferrie and Oswald in Ferrie's apartment on Louisiana Avenue Parkway.

"This in fact was verified to Mr. Phelan by Russo himself, after Mr. Phelan made a special trip to Baton Rouge to talk to Perry Russo personally.

"Mr. Phelan has purposely tried to mislead the American public by telling a half-truth and not showing the full picture."

Brainwash Plan Reported

COLUMBUS, Ohio, April 24 (UPI)—Gordon Novel, a New Orleans night club operator, said today that he had heard District Attorney Jim Garrison outline plans to brainwash the late David W. Ferrie to make him confess to a part in the alleged Kennedy assassination plot.

"The plan to some extent was shooting an atrophine dart into the unsuspecting Ferrie, taking him to a secret place, giving him sodium pentothal, and otherwise abusing him until he confessed," according to a transcript of a lie detector test given to Mr. Novel on March 25.

Mr. Novel and his attorney, Jerry Weiner, held a news conference to release results of the test. Mr. Novel is wanted as a material witness in the investigation.

Mr. Weiner challenged Mr. Garrison to take a similar test.

Mr. Novel, 29 years old, charged that Mr. Garrison's inquiry was a "fraud" motivated by his political ambitions.